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SOCI

SUBJECT: KOSOVO: AFTER A HEATED PRE-ELECTION CAMPAIGN,
KOSOVO SERBS ARE READY TO VOTE

REF: 06 PRISTINA 985

Classified By: COM TINA KAIDANOW FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. In the run-up to the January 21 Serbian parliamentary elections, Serbia-based political parties have been actively campaigning in Kosovo, and some even include Kosovo Serbs as candidates on their electoral lists. In the past weeks, there have been peaceful rallies in Serb-majority areas throughout Kosovo. Kosovo Albanians largely ignored the campaigning, and no violence associated with the rallies was reported. USOP will conduct low-key, informal and unofficial monitoring of voting at polling stations throughout Kosovo. END SUMMARY.

SERBIAN POLITICAL PARTIES CAMPAIGNED ACTIVELY IN KOSOVO

¶2. (C) Serbia-based political parties have been campaigning actively in Serb majority areas throughout Kosovo for the Serbian parliamentary election on January 21 (also the one-year anniversary of the death of Kosovo President Ibrahim Rugova). The largest rallies were organized by the Serbian Radical Party (SRS), including one on January 17 in northern Mitrovica in which, according to the Kosovo Police Service (KPS), 1500 people participated. SRS party secretary Aleksander Vucic led the rally, which highlighted the SRS stance against independence for Kosovo. Approximately 300 people attended a rally organized by Serbian President Boris Tadic's Democratic Party (DS) on January 16 in northern Mitrovica, at which, according to the OSCE, speakers criticized Belgrade's Coordination Center for Kosovo and Metohija (CCK) for its unequal distribution of social assistance. DS speakers emphasized European integration, economic development, education, and crime. DS Kosovo representative and member of the moderate Serbian List for Kosovo and Metohija (SLKM) Goran Bogdanovic told us that DS has campaigned actively in "even the most remote" enclaves across Kosovo, while mentioning that the SRS has only campaigned in the north.

¶3. (C) SLKM leader Randjel Nojkic, Kosovo representative of Serbian Foreign Minister Vuk Draskovic's Serbian Renewal

Movement (SPO), led rallies in Plavetina (Obiliq/Obilic municipality) and Priluzje (Vushtrri/Vucitern municipality) on January 18, attended by 100 and 450 supporters, respectively; in Silovo (Gjilan/Gnjilane) on January 16; and in Rahovec/Orahovac and nearby Velika Hoca on January 13. Head of the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) Ivica Dacic addressed 200 participants at a rally in Ranilug (Kamenice/Kamenica) on January 16; SPS also held a rally in Babin Most (Obilic) that day. Nebojsa Covic led a rally for his Serbian Democratic Party (SDP) (now aligned with the United Pensioners Party (PUPS)) on January 17 in Zvecan, at which speakers included SLKM members Oliver Ivanovic and Gojko Savic. The Kosovo Police Service (KPS) reported that other campaign activities took place throughout Kosovo without incident.

¶4. (C) OSCE reported that the hard-line Serbian National Council (SNC) held a press conference on January 16, at which E.O.-listed SNC chairman Milan Ivanovic urged Kosovo Serbs to vote for the parties that will keep Kosovo in Serbia, including Serbian PM Vojislav Kostunica's Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS), the SRS and SPS.

KEY KOSOVO SERBS RUNNING FOR THE SERBIAN PARLIAMENT

¶5. (C) Several of the parties have Kosovo Serbs on their electoral lists running for seats in the Serbian parliament. Bogdanovic told us he is number 19 on the DS list, while Oliver Ivanovic said he is number three on the SDP list (claiming that he would get a seat if the SDP makes the five percent threshold, which we understand from polling data remains a dubious prospect). Ivanovic added that his real objective is to strengthen his position as a legitimate

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leader in Kosovo, and said that "if circumstances warrant" he would resign from the Serbian parliament and take up his seat in the Kosovo Assembly. He predicted that the Serbian Radical Party (SRS) would get the highest number of votes in Kosovo, but added that it could be a toss-up between DSS and the SDP for second place (in Kosovo). Nojkic said that he was given five spots on the SPO list to fill with Kosovo Serb SPO leaders, but decided not to run for parliament himself. According to the OSCE, the SRS has Kosovo Serbs from central Kosovo, Gnjilane and Mitrovica on its list, while the DS web site shows Kosovo Serbs from Mitrovica, Leposavic, Strpce, Gnjilane and Zvecan on the DS list (with numbers ranging from 29 to 172). E.O.-listee and northern hard-liner Marko Jaksic is number 29 on the DS list.

USOP MONITORING

¶6. (C) USOP will conduct informal, unofficial and discrete (from a distance) monitoring of voting at polling stations throughout Kosovo on January 21. One team will cover Mitrovica and the three northern Serb majority municipalities; one team will cover Gracanica and Gjilane/Gnjilane, and one will cover Lipljan and Strpce. KPS sources told us that they will place additional patrols in areas where Serbs will be voting and KFOR will have an elevated, though non-obtrusive, presence throughout Kosovo on polling day.

¶7. (C) COMMENT. Predictably, Kosovo Serbs and Kosovo Albanians see the Serbian election very differently. Kosovo Albanians, enjoying the unseasonably spring-like weather and patiently waiting for the now-imminent Ahtisaari report, see it as an election in a neighboring state (that has inconveniently delayed their independence). Most Kosovo Serbs, meanwhile, see this election as their chance to vote for the parties that tell them what they want to hear: that they will keep Kosovo in Serbia. We expect a much higher turnout than what we saw for the October referendum on the Serbian constitution. We do not expect any incidents. END COMMENT.

¶8. (U) Post clears this message in its entirety for release

to Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari.
KAIDANOW